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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TBILISI 000942

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KBTS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT UN REPORT ON ABKHAZIA

REF: A. USUN 491

[B. STATE](#) 4Q27

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and comment. The Georgian Government has made clear, both publicly and privately, its discontent with the UN Secretary General (UNSYG)'s report on Abkhazia, Georgia. It perceives both the title and key elements of the report's substance as a capitulation to Russian pressure, as evidenced by the May 18 walkout of the Geneva talks. In a public statement, Foreign Minister Vashadze stated his dissatisfaction with what he called a compromise text, noting, however, that the language was not a victory for Russia either. Abkhaz de facto "foreign minister" Shamba trumpeted the report as a success of the May 18 tactics. Georgian press outlets portrayed the report as a Russian victory at Georgia's expense, and opposition leader Nino Burjanadze portrayed it as a failure of Georgian diplomacy. However the UNSYG and his staff determined the final version of the report, the Georgians clearly perceive this as the UN yielding to Russian pressure. The Georgians believe that the Russians and their proxies have effectively used Geneva to blackmail the UN itself. End summary and comment.

GOVERNMENT: DISSATISFIED IN PUBLIC, OUTRAGED IN PRIVATE

¶2. (SBU) In public comments aired on national TV, Georgian Foreign Minister Vashadze expressed concern over elements of the UNSYG's report on Abkhazia, Georgia (released to UN Security Council members on May 18 under the title "The Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1808, 1839, and 1866"). Although he noted some "positive elements," such as a reference to the current mission by its full name (United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia) in the first paragraph of the text, he suggested that other elements were "obviously included as a result of pressure by Russia." In particular he noted that the entire report, including the title, never uses the phrase "Abkhazia, Georgia." Overall he called the report a compromise, explaining that he was "not very satisfied" with that compromise, but that it could also "not be a source of satisfaction for Moscow" either. He also noted that the government had not completed its detailed examination of the recently received text and might have more comments later. In conclusion, Vashadze promised that "Georgia will never allow Russia to legitimize two virtual Bantustans, which Russia has created on Georgian territory," and suggesting that "Russia's goal is clear -- to kill the UN mission, like it did with the OSCE mission, as Russia does not want to have witnesses of violations of commitments."

¶3. (C) Intentionally or not, Vashadze confused the public discussion of the report somewhat by calling the text a

"preliminary version." (According to a UNOMIG staff member, the text is final, but has only been released to UN Security Council members pending its formal publication.) He also made reference to Security Council action due by June 15, seeming to conflate the publication of a final version of the report with a new UNSC resolution, which would be required by June 15 to establish a new UN mandate for Georgia before the expiry of the current mandate. (Note: It is possible that Vashadze was trying to downplay the negative signifiance of the report by suggesting that UNSC action could correct its deficiencies. End Note.) In TV interviews, Deputy FM Bokeria also noted the importance of the June 15 date, which could suggest the Georgian strategy will now be to focus on the text of a possible UNSC resolution. Even so, both Vashadze and Bokeria made it clear they were not happy with the report.

¶4. (C) In private comments to U.S. delegates at the Geneva talks on May 19, Bokeria and Deputy Reintegration Minister David Rakviashvili deplored the report, seeing it as a capitulation to Russian, South Ossetian and Abkhaz theatrics in Geneva on May 18 and a real threat to Georgia's territorial integrity. (Note: On May 18, at the first of two scheduled days of the fifth round of Geneva talks, the Abkhaz de facto representatives did not appear, because the UN report, originally scheduled for release on May 15, had not yet been issued. After the co-chairs' initial remarks, the South Ossetian de facto representatives then announced they could not participate in a session without their Abkhaz counterparts and left the room; the Russian representatives then followed suit. End Note.) Both noted specific elements

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that served to lend additional support to Abkhaz and South Ossetian so-called "sovereignty," thereby undermining Georgia's territorial integrity, and to legitimize the Russian military presence in Georgia. Bokeria echoed, for example, Vashadze's concern about the complete lack of the phrase "Abkhazia, Georgia." He also objected to the proposed element of a future security regime in paragraph 64(h) -- "Transparency arrangements, including access and provision of information, with regard to the military installations in Senaki and Ochamchira" -- because it seems to suggest that the two bases are equal in status and legitimacy. The phrases "Georgian and Abkhaz sides and key international stakeholders" and "Georgian and South Ossetian sides, as well as representatives of the Defense Ministry of the Russian Federation, OSCE and EU" in paragraphs 4 and 6 respectively, seemed to both Bokeria and Rakviashvili to suggest that Russia is not party to the conflict, but only a disinterested, even responsible third party.

¶5. (C) Bokeria had more fundamental concerns than the text of the report. Right after the Russians and South Ossetians walked out on May 18, Bokeria said that, if the UN report did not refer to the "Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia," everyone would perceive the walkout as a successful bit of blackmail. He noted that this would be the perception even if the title had been decided before the walkout, because no one would know exactly how the UNSYG made his final decision. Bokeria also pointed out that the Russians and their proxy states were effectively using the Geneva process (or would be seen by the world to be using it) to influence the work of the mighty United Nations, of which Abkhazia and South Ossetia are not members -- something the Geneva process was of course not meant to do.

ABKHAZ: PLEASED AS PUNCH

¶6. (SBU) The Russian radio program Eko Moskvy quoted Abkhaz de facto "foreign minister" Sergey Shamba as saying that the Abkhaz tactic of boycotting the first day of talks in Geneva achieved its objective. He suggested that the boycott helped convince the UN to omit references that would suggest that Abkhazia is still part of Georgia, seeing this as evidence

that the international community is beginning to perceive Abkhazia's status as qualitatively altered. "It can be said that, to a certain degree, we have achieved what we wanted . . . We wanted to test the international community and see whether it would be prepared to take the real situation into account or it would continue being hostage to the old stereotypes. Today we saw that there is hope that they will mend their ways," he was quoted as saying.

GEORGIAN PRESS AND OPPOSITION: NOT IMPRESSED

17. (SBU) The developments seemed to take Georgian commentators by surprise. Georgian media outlets, including TV and print outlets from across the political spectrum, portrayed the report as a Russian victory. They also criticized the UN for lowering its standards in the face of Russian pressure. Some in turn went on to criticize the government for allowing this to happen. Opposition leader Nino Burjanadze held a press conference to make this accusation, calling the episode a failure of Georgian diplomacy and blaming the government for losing international support.

COMMENT: PERCEPTION IS MORE THAN REALITY

18. (C) We, of course, cannot get inside the minds of the UN drafters, in particular the UNSYG himself, who reportedly made the final decision on the title himself. Whether they bowed to Russian pressure or not (suggested ref A), however, the perception in Georgia is clearly that the Russian (and Abkhaz and South Ossetian) tactics won. Furthermore, Shamba's statement indicates the de factos are only too happy to take credit for their tactical victory. Vashadze's final comments -- which move away from the report itself to more general themes of protecting Georgia's territorial integrity -- indicate the government is now regrouping to determine how to minimize the damage. One question the Georgians are now asking themselves is whether the Geneva process is more dangerous than helpful. Although the U.S. and other delegations convinced Bokeria not to boycott day 2 of Geneva, in order to avoid being blamed for a complete breakdown of the process, it is hard to argue that the benefits of the Geneva process, which have been minimal to this point, have

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outweighed the costs so far. Not only has Geneva given the de factos a respectable platform, but it has possibly enabled them to twist fundamental international organizations and processes to advance their own agenda.

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